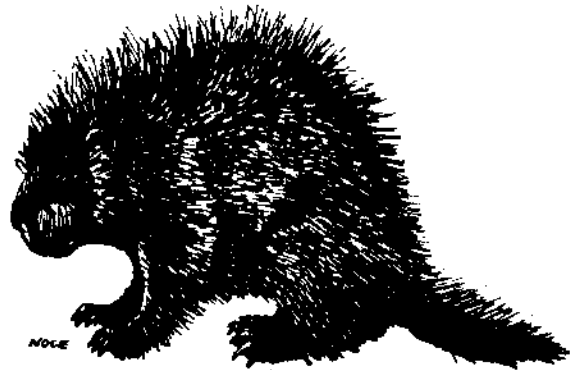


****ATTENTION****

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THE PORCUPINE



In the State of Washington

The porcupine, *Erethizon dorsatum*, is the second largest rodent in Washington surpassed only by the beaver. Although they are generally considered to be forest animals, porcupines are common throughout eastern Washington, including the virtually treeless Columbia Plateau. They are less common, but widely distributed, west of the Cascades.

Porcupines have stout heavy bodies and short legs with long curved claws. They vary in color from black to light yellowish brown. An average "porky" may weigh nearly 20 pounds.

The best known characteristic of the porcupine is its quills, modified hairs from less than 1/2 inch to 5 inches long, generously mixed with the fur on the animal's back and tail. Each quill is equipped with tiny barbs, which enable it to work its way into the face and mouth of any animal foolish or desperate enough to attack a porky. Thus protected, the animal has few enemies. However, most of the larger predators take porcupines on occasion. Cougars are commonly found with their front paws full of quills in varying degrees of deterioration. Fishers may drive a porky out on a small limb to expose its soft, unprotected underparts.

Mating takes place in the fall and the single young is born in May or June. It is born with its eyes open, a full coat of black hair and weighs about a pound. The tiny quills are fully developed and harden as they dry.

FOOD

Contrary to general belief, porcupines do not live on tree bark alone, although this is a very important item in their diet. Conifer bark, especially yellow pine, is preferred, but the bark of many deciduous trees is eagerly taken. Other foods include the foliage of conifers and deciduous trees and shrubs, many forbs, mistletoe, catkins, and nuts. Riding high on their buoyant hollow quills, porkies swim out to eat aquatic plants like water lilies.

Cast-off antlers and bones are regularly eaten, probably to satisfy a need for minerals. Around forest camps nothing containing salt--tool handles, floors, furniture--is safe.

ECONOMIC STATUS

Economically, the porcupine must be rated practically neutral. There is no doubt, of course, that in the course of its feeding on tree bark, some trees are killed and others damaged, but this damage is seldom significant on a large scale. Nevertheless, a damaged fruit or shade tree, tool handle, or building is an important matter to the unfortunate person who sustains the loss. And the porky hardly rates high with one who has laboriously pulled quills from the face of a pet dog or cow.

Porcupine quills are sometimes used for making ornamental designs for "Indian baskets" and other curios. The meat is edible, and the animal may be the only source of meat available to an unarmed person lost in the woods.

It is hardly surprising that this unusual and easily observed animal should have a high esthetic value. For many visitors to the woods, the sight of a porky is the high spot of the day.

CONTROL

Control is seldom necessary save for an occasional high population or destructive individual. In these cases, shooting is probably the best method.